

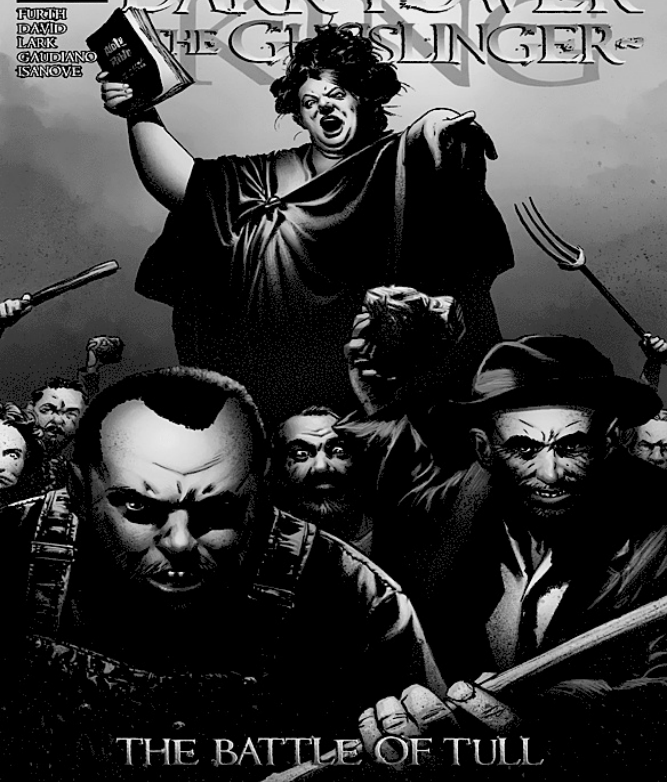
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STEVEN THE DARK TOWER THE GUNSLINGER



THE BATTLE OF TULL

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PREVIOUSLY...

Roland Deschain, last of the line of Arthur Eld, continues his pursuit of the Man in Black across the endless Mohaine Desert. The gunslinger believes he may hold the key to Roland's all-consuming quest for the secret of the Dark Tower.

He travels through Pricetown and eventually reaches the decrepit town of Tull. Attempting to gain knowledge of the Man in Black's whereabouts, Roland sleeps with a female saloon keeper named Allie. She tells him how the Man in Black came to Tull and brought Nort, the town drunk, back to life with a bizarre ritual. Nort gave her a note from the Man in Black that said once she mouthed the word "nineteen" the secrets of death and the land beyond would be opened to her. This terrified Allie and she did all she could not to think of the number.

Before Roland leaves Tull, he is sidetracked to a church where the minister, Sylvia Pittson is preaching. Upon Roland's arrival, she accuses him of being the Interloper...

Roland's hand strays toward his gun, all braced for Sylvia Pittston to turn her congregation upon him. But then...

Who was *with* you in sin, Jonson?

The...the interloper.

Called who?

Called Lord High Satan.

Will you renounce?
Will you *all* renounce?

Yes!
Yes!

Oh my Jesus Savior!

If he walked through that door, would you renounce him to his face?

On my mother's name!

Then I know that God forgives you, just as I know he will cast out the unrepentant from his palaces and into the place of burning darkness beyond the end of End-World!

Praise God!

The gunslinger fades back out the door and heads for town. The smell of the desert is clear in the air.

Almost time to move on.

Almost.

Roland wanders for several more hours, seemingly aimless, but with a purpose nonetheless.

'Cause he's got a knack for seeing things that nobody else sees.

Well...almost nobody else.

The man in black *must* have noticed it.

The way that the clouds never waver in their direction. Instead of being slaves to wherever the breezes may send them...

Always do they move southeast, as if being *dragged* by a magnetic current.

That's why Walter of the Pim came through here. Tull must be on one of the great magnetic Beams that likewise run southeast.

Which means that the coach road is a section of one of the ancient Great Roads. The ones that, according to legend...

...run straight to the front door of the Park Tower.

There can no longer be any doubt. Walter seeks the Tower...

...and who knows *what* happens if he gets there before me.





*On to Kennerly goes Roland.
Not much looking forward
to it, no doubt, but it has
to be done.*

*Now Kennerly, he's a toothless
and unpleasant old satyr who's
buried two wives and is plagued
with daughters.*

*One half-grown one peeks
out from the barn's dusty
shadows, holding a happy
drooling infant.*



*A full grown one catches
the gunslinger's eye and
makes a gesture she
thinks is seductive.*



*To a pimple-faced teen boy
with throbbing loins, it'd do
the trick, all right.*



*To a gunslinger who'd
sooner put his gun down
his OWN throat than his
tongue down hers...*

*...it just gets a gruff,
dismissive cough.*



Kennerly emerges then, his manner vacillating 'twixt a kind of hateful hostility and craven fawning.

Here about 'cher mule? It's bein' cared for, never fear 'at.

Ain't seen no mule in quite a time, specially one that looks as threaded as you'n. Two eyes, four legs...



You get in, Sobbie! You get right the hell in!

I'll whale you, 'Fore God!



I won't bite.

It ain't you, God no, mister. She got a devil. She Wild.

It's coming to Last Times, mister. You know how it say in the Book.

Children won't obey their parents and a plaque'll be visited on the multitudes. You only have to listen to the preacher-woman to know it.

Anyway, like I was saying...time was mules like yours used to grow up wild. But the world has moved on.



Speaking of the wild...what's out there?

Pwellers. Weed. Desert. What else?



How big is the desert?

Big. Maybe a thousand wheels. Maybe two thousand. I can't tell you, mister.

There's nothin' out there but devil-grass and maybe demons.

Heard there was a speakin'-ring sommers on the far side, but that 'us proolly a lie.

That's the way the other fella went. The one who fixed up Narty when he was sick.



Sick? I heard he was **dead**.

But you *do* believe in demons.

Well, well. Maybe. But we're growed-up men, ain't we?



That's a lot different. Preacher woman says--

I'm not interested in her. Just in what's after the desert. Do you know?

No, but some might. The coach ran through part of it fifty years ago. My pap said so.



He used to say 'twas mountains. Others say an *Ocean*... a green ocean with monsters.

And some say that's where the world ends. That there ain't nothing but lights that'll drive a man blind...

...and the Face of God with his mouth open to eat them up.





The next day is the last day, and Roland likely knows it.

The sky's an ugly, bruised purple, weirdly lit from above with the first fingers of dawn.

Allie moves about like a wraith, lighting lamps, tending corn flitters that sputter in the skillet.



She has sensed the coming end and had given more in her love making than she had ever given, and she had given it with desperation against the coming of the dawn.

Given it with tireless energy, like she was sixteen.

But come morning she's pale, on the brink of menopause again.



Sylvia Pittston. Her house--?



She won't see you. She doesn't see *anybody*. She only comes out on Sunday evenings to scare the hell out of everybody.





By the time he reaches Sylvia Pittston's shack, the wind's just about died. Whole world seems to be waiting.

He's been in the desert long enough to know that the longer the lull, the harder the blow when it finally comes.



No answer to his repeated knock. And as ya know by now...



Roland has never been much for waiting about.



Sylvia Pittston sits and stares at him calmly with those great and dark eyes.





The stormlight falls on her cheeks in crazy half-tones, and the rocker makes tiny squeaking noises.

They look at each other for a long, clockless moment.

You will *never* catch him.



Him.
Meaning the man in black.

Yes. You will never catch him, for you walk in the way of evil.

He came to you.



And to my bed. He spoke to me in the Tongue. The High Speech. He...



"He *screwed* you, didn't he? In every sense of the word."



You walk an evil way, gunslinger. You stand in shadows. Did you think I couldn't see you in the Holy Place yesterday?

Why did he heal the weed-eater?

He's an angel of God. He *said* so.



I hope he *smiled* when he said it.

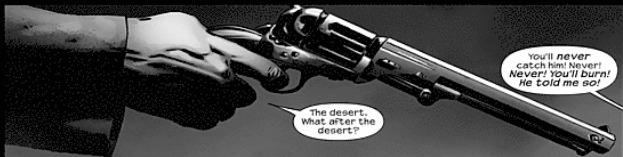
He told me you would follow. He told me what to do. He said you are the Antichrist and that you'd want to bed me. Is it true?



Did you ever meet a man who *didn't* want to bed you?

The price of my flesh would be your life, gunslinger.





You'll *never*
catch him! Never!
Never! You'll burn!
He told me so!

The desert.
What after the
desert?



I'll catch
him. We both
know it.

What is
beyond the
desert?
Answer me.

No!



The demon,
then. Out it
comes. I just
shove this
in and--

No! No!
No!



Mountains!!!

He stops...on
the other side...
a-s-sweet Jesus!...to
m-make his strength!
Med-m-meditation!
Do you understand!?
Oh, I'm...I'm...





By the time he arrives at Kennerly's, a queer obscurity has come over the northern horizon, and he knows it's dust.

Over. Tull the air is still dead quiet.

Leaving?

Yar.

Not before the storm?

Ahead of it.

The wind goes faster than any man on a mule. In the open it can kill you.

I'll want the mule now.

Sure.

But even as he grins his groveling, hate-filled grin, his eyes flick up and over the gunslinger's shoulder.





He walks the mule up the center of the street, his boots sending up squirts of dust.



Allie?



Hard to keep his last promise to her if she ain't there, but such is the case.



The tonk is still dirty from the night before and stinks of sour beer.



Sheb's piano bids him a silent, yellow-toothed toodle-oo.

And if you're thinking that he might still avoid the trap, well...

...you should be knowing better by now.

He is, after all, the Interloper.







No, Satan!
It ends here!
You end
here!

*Kill the
Interloper!*



TO BE CONTINUED

CHARACTERIZATION. CHARACTERS. AND THE VILLAINOUS SYLVIA PITTSTON

Years ago, while I was studying at the University of Maine, my creative writing teacher told me how she judged successful characterization. *Terrific characters*, she said, *leap off the page. They feel real to me, almost as if I'm meeting them in the flesh.* Connie Hunting's definition of successful characterization has stayed with me ever since. It is the measure by which I evaluate characters in the books I read and in the stories I write. Creating such characters—imaginary creatures that have the spark of life—is an incredibly difficult thing to do, and is one which authors spend hours laboring over and worrying about. *What would my character do in this particular scene?* A writer might ask himself. Or, *How would they react to what has just been said to them?* Such questions are important. In order to make our characters seem real we need to know their personal traits and to understand their individual motivations. But as we all know, even the most even-tempered, consistent person can occasionally surprise us. Hence, every writer has to balance their characters'

predictability with a touch of unpredictability, and that is perhaps the most difficult task of all. As writers, we want to use characters to create plot twists, but we also realize that any surprise actions or decisions have to grow out of believable circumstances. Perhaps our characters have secret desires or hidden obsessions, ones that—when they come to light—make our readers nod their heads. Oh yes, they might think. *I should have known that all along*

Strong characters—like strong people—don't like to be pushed around. This often means that they can be downright wayward. As all of you writers out there know, you might want your character to act in a certain way so that your story can progress smoothly, but sometimes they just won't behave themselves. A point comes in every writer-character relationship when the writer has to throw up his hands and give up control. You are writing and writing, madly tapping the computer keys, thinking you know exactly how a particular scene will work out. But even as you write, the situation begins to morph under your fingertips. Suddenly, your protagonist does the unexpected, leaving you reeling with shock. *Where the heck did THAT come from?* You might ask yourself, but the answer is obvious. You've been trying to breathe life into your character for so long, worried that she won't live on the page, and then suddenly she gives you a good swift kick. *I'm alive*, she says, *and I'm gonna do things MY way.*

Unless a character starts to grow a backbone of her own—doing and saying things that the author doesn't expect, can't predict, or perhaps doesn't even like—the character remains no



more than an inanimate piece of meat, like Frankenstein's monster lying cold upon the slab. We may borrow an interesting hand motion from one person, a great laugh from another, a compelling tone of voice from a third, but unless the conglomerate personality parts fit together, the character just won't breathe. They will remain wooden.

As writers, we spend a lot of time creating our protagonists, but powerful characterization is just as important in the rest of our support cast. Think of all the great films you've seen. Where would the plot be without all of those minor characters going about their lives, foiling our protagonists' plans, or falling in love with them, or tripping them up? The story just wouldn't be the same without all of those colorful extras giving the story substance, variety, and interest. Most of the time, it takes a lot of hard work to create such intense extra characters. But occasionally these support actors arrive by themselves. It's not so much that they leap off the page but step *onto* it. They are the real thing—a person who exists in an imaginary universe but who feels no less alive than the rest of us.

In my opinion, Sylvia Pittston is just such a living, breathing character. In the greater scheme of the *Dark Tower* saga, Sylvia Pittston is far from a major player. Unlike Walter O'Dim, she does not haunt Roland later in his travels. Unlike the witch Rhea of the Cöos, who is a major force in *Wizard and Glass*, Sylvia Pittston's tale takes up relatively few pages. However from the first time I read about Pittston I was struck by the power of her personality and the importance of her role. The part she plays in Roland's life is brief but profound. In fact, as we will see in the conclusion of our tale (which I shall not mention now!) Roland's conflict

with Pittston is a pivotal experience in his development.

Like so many power-hungry people, Sylvia Pittston is a mass of contradictions. On the one hand, she plays the part of the archetypal ascetic. Like a Biblical prophet, she came out of the desert and now lives alone in a shack on the edge of the town, emerging only on Sundays to preach to the people. She wears a dress of burlap and preaches against fornication, whipping her congregation into frenzied repentance. In a tide of tears and hallelujahs, her followers forswear





their alliances with the Anti-Christ, a creature called the Crimson King.

But despite her apparent celibacy and her vilification of fleshly pleasures, Pittston is actually an incredibly

sensual figure. When Roland first sees her, he is overwhelmed by her powerful sexual presence:

No description could take the measure of the woman. Breasts like earthworks. A huge pillar of a neck overtopped by a pasty white moon of a face, in which blinked eyes so large and so dark that they seemed to be bottomless tarns. Her hair was a beautiful rich brown and it was piled atop her head in a haphazard sprawl, held by a hairpin almost big enough to be a meat skewer. She wore a dress that seemed to be made of burlap. The arms that held the hymnal were slabs. Her skin was creamy, unmarked, lovely. He thought that she must top three hundred pounds. He felt a sudden red lust for her that made him feel shaky, and he turned away.



When Roland visits Pittston in her shack, he discovers that she is just as lusty as he'd thought. When the Man in Black had passed through Tull,

Pittston had taken him into her bed.

But Pittston's evil does not end with fornication. Though she calls herself a holy woman, she allowed Walter O'Dim to get her with child. She tells Roland that the embryo she carries does not belong to Walter but to the very Red King she preaches against. Though she knows the nature of the father of her child, Pittston insists that her mantle of holiness remains intact. In a mad rant, she states that Walter is an angel of God and that Roland is the Anti-Christ. She knows that Roland lusts for her, but tells him that he cannot invade her body because of the child she carries. The price would be too high. Roland does not have relations with Pittston. Instead he uses his gun (the very one that belonged to Arthur Eld, Guardian of the White) to remove the demon inside of her. Afterwards, Pittston weeps and demands that Roland leave her shack. He has killed the child of the Crimson King, but he will pay the price.

By the end of this issue, we realize that what Roland's lover Allie said was true—Pittston's religion is poison. Though Pittston may believe in her twisted convictions, she is a religious hypocrite, and because of her influence upon the townsfolk, she is a potentially dangerous enemy. Her sermons—filled with references to the Crimson King, and to the evil LaMerk industries—make Roland wonder whether she arrived in Tull via one of the Old People's machines—perhaps even a train that came all the way from the dark land of End-World.

Those of you who are longtime King fans will recognize certain facets of Pittston's personality from characters in other King novels. For example, Sylvia Pittston shares some traits with Mrs. Carmody in "The Mist". Like Pittston, Mrs. Carmody is a crazy and potentially violent religious zealot. Her preaching is full of fire and brimstone, and she is only too willing to sacrifice children to her vengeful God. Like so many people in our world whose beliefs lead them to commit acts of violence, Pittston's religious calling is fanatical, and her self-proclaimed holiness is tainted by very real evil. She is at once an ascetic, a sensualist, a self-proclaimed savior, and an evil traitor. Like so many false prophets, she claims to stomp out evil, and yet willingly aligns herself with that very evil, telling herself it is good. By her mad contradictions, she goads our gunslinger, Roland, into committing some less than admirable acts. Yet despite her incredible contradictions, Sylvia Pittston remains completely believable. In fact, I would venture to say that her contradictions are what make her so compelling and so real.

Until next month, long days and pleasant nights!

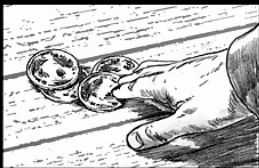
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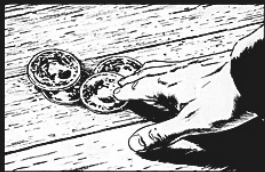


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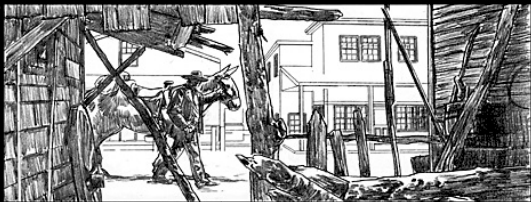




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DARK TOWER: TELL - ISSUE 4

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INKS BY STEFANO GAUDIANO



COVER INKS FOR TULL #4 BY MICHAEL LARK



NEXT: "KILL THE INTERLOPER! KILL THE ANTICHRIST!"





All is not well in Mid-World. Gunslinger Roland Deschain has seen his father's Affiliation fall to the Good Man's forces. With his ka-tet murdered and Gilead in ruins, Roland has accepted his destiny to seek and save the Dark Tower and set right this out-of-synch world. For now, Roland's search has him crossing the desert, pursuing the Man in Black, who holds the key to finding the Dark Tower. However, the Man in Black has left traps in his wake for the gunslinger, and upon entering the sleepy town of Tull, Roland fears he may have just stepped into one.

From the creative team that brought Roland's early adventures to life comes a new phase in the saga of the last gunslinger. This is a dark chronicle of revenge, lust, betrayal, and destiny—a cosmic quest that could only be conceived by master storyteller Stephen King.

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